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South Haven's South Beach named best beach in Michigan

By James Windell

If you live in South Haven, you may already know that South Beach is a special beach. In fact, it may be one of the reasons you chose to live in South Haven.

But USA TODAY's 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards just confirmed what we already know when it named South Haven's South Beach as Best Beach in Michigan.

This award comes to South Haven as lifeguards have returned to the beach for the first time in 25 years.

Located just south of the South Pier and South Haven's historic red lighthouse, South Beach is known for its wide sandy shoreline, walkable access to downtown, and one of the most recognizable views on Michigan's west coast – the South Haven Lighthouse and catwalk.

"For more than 100 years, South Haven has been a place where families come to make summer memories, and South Beach remains one of the most beloved parts of that tradition," says Jen Sistrunk, Executive Director of Visit South Haven. "Generations of visitors have walked the pier, watched the sunset, played along the shoreline, and returned year after year. This recognition honors not only a beautiful beach, but South Haven's lasting place as one of Michigan's classic resort towns."

"South Beach isn't just a beautiful place to spend the day – it's a beach designed for everyone," said Kate Hosier, South Haven City Manager. "Its accessibility features, family-friendly atmosphere, and iconic lakeshore setting helped earn this well-deserved recognition as the best beach in the state."

South Beach amenities include a playground, splash pad, concession stand, kayak and paddleboard rentals, free beach wheelchair rentals, and six life jacket loaner stations. Although South Haven is home to seven public beaches and access sites, both North Beach and South Beach are recognized as the community's largest and most frequently used beaches.

According to Travel Michigan, Michigan tourism generated $54.8 billion in total economic impact in 2024, including more than $30 billion in visitor spending, and supported more than 350,000 jobs statewide. South Haven's beaches, downtown, harbor, trails, events, and small businesses all play a role in that statewide tourism story.

Visit South Haven is the destination marketing organization for the South Haven area and Van Buren County, promoting travel, tourism, events, local businesses, and the lakeshore experiences that make South Haven one of Michigan's premier beach towns.

Being designated as the Best Beach in Michigan is really important to Visit South Haven, according to Sistrunk.

"This recognition gives South Haven national credibility and puts us in front of travelers who may be choosing their next Lake Michigan getaway," she says. "With our area already welcoming millions of visits each year, being named Best Beach in Michigan by USA TODAY gives people one more exciting reason to make South Haven their destination of choice when looking at other lakeshore communities."

She added that the award helps make her and her staff's jobs much easier.

"It gives us a powerful third-party endorsement that supports what we already know: South Haven is a premier beach destination," she says. "It also gives our partners, businesses, and community a shared point of pride and a fresh reason to promote South Haven together."

Sistrunk notes that the award will certainly be a boon to promoting South Haven. "We'll use this recognition across our website, social media, email marketing, advertising, PR, and partner outreach to keep South Haven top-of-mind for travelers," she says. "Our message is simple: come for Michigan's best beach and stay for everything else that makes South Haven unforgettable."

Lifeguard watch towers delivered to South Beach

By James Windell

On Thursday afternoon on May 28, 2026 at 5:00 pm., a flatbed semitruck showed up at South Beach with two lifeguard watch towers.

Chief Lifeguard David Figueredo arrived on the scene several minutes later trying to figure out how to get a forklift at that hour to unload the semi so the driver could head back to Stuart, Florida.

The South Beach lifeguards have been operating without a conspicuous place to perch since they began patrolling the beach on Memorial Day. City staff had previously indicated that two lifeguards "stands" and two towers had been ordered.

It was on February 16, 2026, when the City Council formally approved the purchase of lifeguard towers and stands during its regular meeting. This approval authorized buying two lifeguard towers and two lifeguard stands as part of launching the city's new lifeguard program.

At that City Council meeting, the council voted to purchase the equipment from Bausch Enterprises, with total costs reported between $65,200 and $86,200. This purchase followed the city's November 2025 decision to reinstate lifeguards for the first time in over two decades.

At the time of reinstatement of the lifeguard program, the City Manager emphasized urgency so the towers could be installed before Memorial Day – the traditional start of the tourist season when the beach would be crowded.

Although on Thursday after 5:00 pm no forklifts could be found, the truck driver and two lifeguards found that they could move the lifeguard stands, which are specifically Bausch's Rescue-T Watch Towers, and maneuver them off the truck and into the parking lot. Figueredo said he knew they had been shipped this week but that he didn't expect them to arrive so soon.

The relatively lightweight lifeguard watch towers are made of aluminum and are fairly portable so they can be moved around South Beach depending on where the lifeguards want to be stationed to best monitor swimmers on any particular day.

On Friday, Figueredo and his staff were putting canvas covers on the watch towers. And they were moved onto South Beach in the afternoon.

South Haven harbor dredging underway

By Tom Renner

Dredging is underway on Lake Michigan in the South Haven Harbor by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is taking place at the harbor entrance, between breakwater heads, and upstream to North Shore Drive. The dredged material is being transported through submerged pipeline and discharged for beach replenishment. The work is predicted to last the month of June. The Corps of Engineers in a press release said samples of the dredged material are taken to confirm it's suitable for beach replenishment. The submerged pipeline is marked with orange buoys every 500 feet and a bright yellow, lit pontoon at each end. Boaters are asked to use caution near the dredging equipment.

Volunteers plant flowers in several locations

By Tom Renner

Flowers adorn South Haven in several locations thanks to the efforts of volunteers and the city parks staff. Plantings were recently completed at the downtown Huntington Bank wall, the Dyckman drawbridge, Johnston Park and Dyckman Park.

The volunteers represented SHOUT for South Haven, the South Haven Garden Club, Rotary Club of South Haven and nurses from Bronson Hospital - South Haven. Mayor Annie Brown joined the more than 30 volunteers at the bridge planting.

The plantings on the bank wall and Dyckman bridge were designed to celebrate the nationwide "America250" celebration. The bridge plantings, coordinated by Rotarian Bob Metzen, feature red and white begonias and purple-bluish petunias. The bank wall, designed by city gardener Ahni Turner, spells-out "250" with a fireworks burst.

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2ND FRONT PAGE

Lawton Village Council establishes 2026 village millage rates

By Paul Garrod
Staff Writer
news4garrod@gmail-com

LAWTON - The Lawton Village Council, at its May 26 meeting, approved establishing the 2026 village millage rates.

Following an earlier public hearing to establish the Village of Lawton 2026 Millage rates at a total of 16.8271 mills, the Lawton Village Council approved the rates following a roll call vote, with council member Char Raber casting the lone dissenting vote.

The proposed millage rate is lower than last year's (16.9322) millage rate, and sits at 16.8271 for 2026, due to the Headlee Amendment and will generate a 2.71 percent increase of the net operating tax revenues for the Village of Lawton.

Village Council President Josh Appleby said that the Truth in Taxation Hearing is completed each year to allow for the inflationary increase which will total $22,964, $15,514 for operating, $6,207 for streets, and $1,242 for library.Appleby said the proposed millage rate is lower than last year's (16.9322) millage rate, and sits at 16.8271 for 2026, due to the Headlee Amendment and will generate a 2.71 percent increase of the net operating tax revenues for the Village of Lawton.

The council set June 9, following a ZBA Public hearing to receive comment on the proposed 2026-2027 budget year to the floor.

Lawton Village Manager Todd Hackenberg said the village Splashpad is now up and operational, while the pickleball court is currently being worked on. It is scheduled to be open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

North Shore teacher recognized as South Haven Teacher of Year

By James Windell

Barbara Raak, a fourth-grade teacher at North Shore Elementary School, was selected by her peers as Teacher of the Year for 2026.

Raak, who has been teaching in South Haven for 30 years, received a plaque at the South Haven Board of Education meeting on May 27, 2026.

When introducing the presenting of the award, School Board President Shawn Olney commented: "This makes my heart so happy. My son had Mrs. Baak, and she's amazing."

Jennifer Peterson, a South Haven High School teacher, commented that "We are so grateful for Barb and for her 30 years of dedicated service to South Haven Public Schools." She added that Raak contributed 33 years of service in education, and that the district is grateful for her leadership commitment and her enthusiasm.

And as Raak reached the front of the room, Peterson said: "It's because of you that the students, the teachers, and the community of South Haven have the successes that they have had, and we just wanted to be able to recognize you in front of the community."

School Superntendent Ana Aleman-Putman said that Raak was a leader at North Shore. She cited Raak's encouragement of younger teachers and said, "I really appreciate that."

During Raak's career she has been recognized at the district and community level with numerous educational leadership awards. She serves on numerous committees and mentoring programs to make a positive contribution. She is often found at sporting events where she assists at volleyball and basketball competitions.

Raak has been a high school JV softball coach for more than 25 years.

Accepting her Teacher of the Year award, Raak said that much has changed in the 30 years she has taught in South Haven. "But I'm not done yet," she commented. "So, if they think that was why I got this, I'm not done yet."

Teaching, she said, is her passion. "I love it. And I just know that that's what I'm here for…This is where I'm meant to be and I've always been in South Haven. It's great and I love it. So, thank you."

Briggs Dam project nears completion

PAW PAW - With the arrival of warmer weather, the Village of Paw Paw urges residents and visitors to stay clear of the Briggs Dam area until the project is fully completed.

Paw Paw Village Manager Bryan Myrkle said the site is still under construction and will remain closed to the public for the next 30 to 45 days while seeded grass areas begin to grow and until a safety railing can be installed.

Myrkle said, "The area is closed to all access utilizing temporary fencing and no trespassing signs are in place. Violators who trespass could face prosecution for any damage caused to landscaping, fencing or signage."

He concluded, "Anyone who sees dangerous behavior at this location is asked to call 9-1-1 to report it."

The new dam, the first Labyrinth style dam in Michigan, was designed by Barr Engineering, of Minneapolis, Mn., and the Village of Paw Paw. It was constructed by Milbocker & Sons, of Allegan.

It was constructed to meet 200-year flood/rainfall standards.

The new dam cost approximately $3 million, with approximately $2 million coming from the State of Michigan, through the efforts of State Senator Aric Nesbitt.

New Exhibit Opens at Michigan Maritime Museum

By James Windell

The new Harris Commercial Fishing Building at the Michigan Maritime Museum has just opened with a new exhibit. Since the recently completed building was once home to Jensen's Fishery, one of the area's long-standing commercial fishing operations, it's appropriate that the new exhibit is called Working the Water: Commercial Fishing on Lake Michigan.

The Museum purchased the Jensen property in 2020 to expand its campus, preserve historic working-waterfront heritage, and restore the shoreline for public access and educational use. Working the Water highlights the fascinating history and heritage of the commercial fishing industry in South Haven and throughout Lake Michigan.

Bailey Sisoy-Moore, Executive Director of the Museum, is proud of the Harris Commercial Fishing Building, which had to be rebuilt after it was found to be unsalvageable. "When that building came down, Cottage Home faithfully recreated it," she says. "They did such a good job that people come out here and ask 'Where's the new building?'"

She is equally proud of the exhibit that is housed in the Harris Building. "The exhibit goes over the fish that built our fishery and it shows examples of the two most commonly used nets, pound nets and gill nets," she points out as she walks around the exhibit that utilizes the whole building.

Although past exhibits have been installed by businesses that specialize in museum exhibits, Sisoy-Moore says that this exhibit was done in-house.

"We worked with the DNR to try to really build in some samples of how the lake is now," she explains pointing to an exhibit wall. "We took the 10 species of fish currently in the lake that drive recreational and commercial fishing and show how their numbers map out across 100 fish."

BAILEY SISOY-MOORE

On the other side of the building, she noted that the tools of the commercial fishing trade are displayed. And on another wall, there are exhibits of the invasive species that are known on the Great Lakes. "Then up in the corner there, we have a selection of vessels from South Haven and the surrounding area," she says.

Sisoy-Moore comments that the Museum only has five staff members. "So, we're a very small team, and this exhibit was done by the five of us," she says, "with the help of the Do It Corporation, who did the printing. But every screw and every nail was put up by the team ourselves."

She noted that museums are going away from doing their designs in-house and that many museums now hire companies. "That's a huge industry that has blossomed since the 1990s – companies that come in and sell museums their exhibits," she says.

With a renewed focus on education at the Museum, Sisoy-Moore says it was important to her that the Working the Water exhibit was built in a way that it became useful for their education team. "This is the first exhibit to be done by the staff here in many, many years, certainly since the expansion of the campus," she says, "It's a really exciting turning point because it really says to the community and to the museum world that we have the skills and abilities to do this work in-house. This means that with 75 percent less money being spent on exhibits we can do four times the number of exhibits."

Working the Water: Commercial Fishing on Lake Michigan will run for the next five years. The exhibit is available as part of general admission to the Michigan Maritime Museum which is open every day from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Admission is $15 for adults, $12 for seniors and $8 for children.

For more information, visit michiganmaritimemuseum.org

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Commemorative flag presented to Lawrence American Legion

A coffin flag was presented to the Lawrence American Legion, Hess-Eastman Post 174, Monday night during a luminary ceremony held at Hill Cemetery, Lawrence Township. Barry Carpp, a Lawrence Boy Scout Troop 197 leader, shown at left, presented the flag to Lawrence American Legion Commander, Charles Moden, shown at far right, and legion member, Pete Alburtus, center. With the Legion serving as the troop's charter organization, Carpp felt the legion should be the recipient to honor the veterans and as a reminder of the relationship between the two organizations. The Lawrence Boy Scouts are marking their 100th anniversary this year. A commemorative Troop 197 patch with the number "100" was included in the coffin flag.
Courier-Leader photo/Paul Garrod

Paw Paw Fire Department responds to garage fire

The Paw Paw Fire Department was dispatched at 9:37 a.m., Thursday May 28, to the 4000 block of Red Arrow Highway for a garage fire. First arriving units arrived at 9:41 a.m. to a working fire in a detached garage with flames and smoke showing. Firefighters brought the fire under control by 9:51 a.m. and prevented it from spreading to a nearby residence. A total of 19 Paw Paw firefighters responded, and units remained on scene until 10:39 a.m. The Paw Paw Fire Department was assisted by the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office and Van Buren Emergency Medical Services (EMS).
Courier-Leader photo/Paul Garrod

Occupant safely evacuated from mobile home fire

Firefighters quickly extinguished a blaze in a residence at the Lakeshore Mobile Home Park, 16th Avenue, South Haven Township on Thursday night.

SHAES was dispatched shortly before 11 p.m. with Bangor and Covert fire departments responding as mutual aid.

SHAES is giving credit to neighbors who safely evacuated the occupant and controlled the blaze with an extinguisher and garden hose until firefighters arrived.

The fire was confined to an area of the roof.

The Red Cross provided help to the resident.

Duda selected AAUW art winner

Cathy Duda, South Haven, has been selected as a winner in the national American Association of University Women (AAUW) 2026 Art Contest. The piece is featured as part of a notecard collection which is mailed to all members nationwide as part of the annual fundraising appeal. The fundraising appeal is a tradition that helps to support AAUW's mission to advance gender equity for women and girls through research.

Duda is a retired South Haven art teacher and a thirteen-year member of AAUW. She has been involved in the AAUW Scholarship and Fundraising Committees which help to provide scholarships for area women and girls in their pursuit of continued and higher education. She also volunteers on the Community Outreach Committee providing "Blessings in a Backpack", supplemental nutrition to elementary students in need.

"The collected driftwood and rocks from the shores of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior represent the beauty of the Great Lakes area. They inspired the piece," Duda said.

She said creating many kinds of art has been a life-long passion and career. I hope it inspires young girls and other women to follow their own passions when given the opportunity to obtain a higher education.

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South Haven City Council approves 2026-27 budget

James Windell

The South Haven City Council approved four resolutions which authorize the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget for the City.

Following two budget workshops and opportunities to discuss the budget at previous City Council meetings and following a public hearing on the budget, the South Haven City Council was presented with the resolutions by City Manager Kate Hosier.

The four resolutions were:

a)Resolution 2026-19: A Resolution adopting the 2026-27 Fiscal Year Budget for Component Unit Funds of the City of South Haven, Michigan;

b)Resolution 2026-20: A Resolution adopting the 2026-27 Fiscal Year Budget for General, Special Revenue, Debt Service, Capital Projects and Fiduciary Funds of the City of South Haven, Michigan;

c)Resolution 2026-21: A Resolution adopting the 2026-27 Fiscal Year Budget for Enterprise and Internal Service Funds of the City of South Haven, Michigan;

d)Resolution 2026-22: A Resolution setting the 2026 Property Tax Millage.

Councilman Jeff Arnold made a motion to approve all four resolutions. The motion was seconded and a voice vote seemed to indicate council approval.

However, as the voice vote was in process, Councilwoman Mary Hosley indicated she had some items for discussion.

Hosley raised concerns regarding potential deficits and discrepancies on page 74 of the agenda packet, specifically noting that the licenses and permits category had an original budget of $982,600 but a projected total of nearly $1.5 million. Hosley pointed out that year-to-date revenue through February 28 for licenses and permits was only $600,000. She questioned whether the budget would eventually face a deficit. She made a similar inquiry regarding "changes for service," which showed an original budget of $153,175 against a much higher projected figure of $508,675. Hosier explained that these figures are directly related to changes in the short-term rental program, which is currently operating as a two-year program on a one-year budget cycle.

Finance Director Michelle Argue confirmed that the City uses a modified accrual basis for its accounting, meaning revenue must be attributed to the year it was paid. It was indicated that the actual budget figures will not be fully reconciled until the end of June or into July, 2026. It was also clarified that the revenue budget includes fines for overstaying, concession licenses, and various vendor agreements, even though the specific fine amounts have not been increased.

Following the discussion, Hosley requested a formal roll call vote for the approval of the budget resolutions. The four resolutions were approved by a unanimous vote.

GOP fundraiser attendees greeted by Huizenga protestors

DECATUR – Dissatisfied constituents with U.S. Congressional Representative Bill Huizenga's voting record gathered Saturday, May 30, outside the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in Decatur where Huizenga was the keynote speaker at a fundraiser event hosted by Van Buren County Republicans.

Advocates from five Indivisible groups within Huizenga's 4th district in West Michigan, along with about 100 constituents, staged a "Retire Huizenga Party" along Phelps Street as Huizenga seeks re-election in November. Protesters hoisted signs and large banners depicting Huizenga's voting record, while others sang along with songs and chants such as "Hit the Road, Bill and Don't Come Back No More" as campaign donors arrived at the late afternoon event.

"Rep. Huizenga has voted for the Big, Beautiful Bill which benefits corporations and the uber-wealthy, while hiding from his constituents and taking millions in corporate donations that support policies that benefit industries like oil, gas, and utilities," said Ann Burch, a spokesperson for Indivisible Paw Paw, one of the organizers of the event along with For Our Future Michigan. "Huizenga is listed as one of 19 most corrupt politicians in 2026 by End Citizens United, a non-profit fighting to get corporate money out of politics."

According to the End Citizens United website, Rep. Huizenga has received more than $5.6 million in corporate PAC donations over his 15-year career, and just 1.08 percent of his 2024 contributions came from small individual donors.

"Huizenga supported legislation benefiting allies in the oil and gas industry, and ICE lobbyists - all while receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from them," the spokesperson said. "As vice chair of the House Financial Services Committee, Rep. Huizenga consistently uses his position to benefit corporate donors by weakening oversight agencies and consumer protection laws.

"This is one of the most powerful positions in Congress for shaping Wall Street policy," the spokesperson added. "We want accountability from him for his voting record that has hurt hundreds of thousands of Michiganders through Medicaid cuts and elimination of programs that help low-income families who need assistance with their utility bills and reduction in nutrition services. We will keep the pressure on him to answer to his constituents. We are not going away."

Indivisible is a progressive grassroots movement and organization in the United States. There are 10 Indivisible groups within Michigan's 4th congressional district. The current 4th district contains much of Michigan's old 6th district, and includes all of Allegan and Van Buren counties, as well as portions of Ottawa, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, and Berrien counties.

South Haven Area Community Foundation Hands Out Grants

James Windell

Speaking at the South Haven City Council Meeting on June 1, 2026, Bob Straits, President of the South Haven Area Community Foundation, announced grants and scholarships given out this year by the foundation.

"The Community Foundation is about creating endowments and creating legacies," Straits told the City Council. "A percentage of these endowments is annually used to fund grants to nonprofits and educational institutions providing services to our community."

Straits pointed out that the foundation was incorporated 20 years ago and has distributed $1.6 million locally to various nonprofit and educational organizations.

"This year, we are awarding $39, 600 in scholarships to 31students from the South Haven schools," Straits said. "We also have a youth advisory council, called YAC, from the South Haven Public Schools that is made up of students who operate much like a community foundation. In fact, there's an endowment specifically for that purpose to train them on how to lead a foundation. And they have given to various grants that they received, $5,161. In addition to that, tonight I am recognizing, and, I appreciate the opportunity for you to make this public, 21 grants that we are giving out, and $125,253."

Among the organizations receiving grants, Straits listed SHAES for updated drones for rescue, EMS, and fire suppression; Al-Van Humane Society for their spay and neuter program; Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, supporting the 2026 Conference of Gardens and People; Foundry Hall for the Riverfront Concert and Jazz Festival; South Haven Regional Business Hub for growth and strong leadership series; South Haven Center for the Arts, Creative Aging 2026 exhibitions and programs; and the South Haven Boating Foundation, for new sailboats, life jackets replacements, and 20 needs-based scholarships.

In addition, Straits mentioned South Haven Public nonprofit organization that received grants: The South Haven Speaker Series, South Haven Theater Series, South Haven Steelheaders, We Care Community Resource Center, Pretty Inc. (a summer program for minority girls), South Haven Performance Series, People Helping People, Area Agency on Aging, the Dog Park, Michigan Maritime Museum, and the Youth Development Company. Finally, other organizations receiving grants from the Community Foundation were the Van Buren County Volunteer Sheriffs, Hope Parent Resource Network, and the Bangor Trap Team.

The mission of the South Haven Area Community Foundation is to enrich the quality of life in the greater South Haven area by securing its future through endowments.

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VIEWPOINT

Time to Abolish MEDC

MIKE'S MUSINGS

MIKE WILCOX
PUBLISHER

For decades, politicians from both parties have defended the Michigan Economic Development Corporation with the same promise: targeted incentives and subsidies will attract jobs, revive communities, and create prosperity. It sounds appealing. If government can selectively help businesses expand, why not use that power to strengthen the state's economy?

The problem is that after years of experiments and billions in incentives, taxpayers should ask a simple question: why are we still relying on this model?

Consider the Fay Beydoun case. Beydoun, who served on MEDC's executive committee, was connected to a $20 million state grant for Global Link International that was administered through the state's economic development apparatus. Investigators later alleged that grant funds intended for economic development were diverted to personal expenses and unrelated spending. Prosecutors have alleged forged documentation, improper expenditures, and false reporting, while the attorney general described the process as one with minimal oversight and unusual political connections.

Then there is the Clare Complete Health Park project. A project that many of our readers in Mid-Michigan are very familiar with. A $25 million earmark for a health and recreation complex was awarded to a nonprofit created shortly before funding was approved. State officials later suspended payments after identifying red flags, including allegations involving self-dealing and undisclosed financial relationships. The founder, Clare native Dave Coker now faces felony charges related to the handling of grant money.

These examples involve different people, different regions, and different political circles. One grew from Detroit-area business networks; another emerged from legislative relationships in rural Michigan. Yet they raise the same question: why does Michigan continue relying on systems where politically connected projects can receive tens of millions of taxpayer dollars before basic warning signs are detected?

The issue is larger than any individual scandal. It is whether government should continue operating an economic development model that concentrates public money, discretion, and influence in ways that can reward access rather than results.

The MEDC represents a philosophy of economic development that assumes government officials can identify tomorrow's winners and steer public money toward them. But economies rarely work that way. Growth is usually driven by entrepreneurs, workers, small businesses, and market demand—not by state agencies deciding which companies deserve special treatment.

Programs built around tax credits, grants, and incentives create an uneven playing field. Large corporations with lobbyists and political connections often have advantages in navigating these systems, while small businesses operating on Main Streets across Michigan receive little benefit. The local manufacturer with twenty employees does not have a team of consultants pursuing state incentives. The family-owned restaurant, contractor, or startup often pays taxes that help fund benefits awarded elsewhere.

There is also a fairness question. Government should create rules that apply equally to everyone, not distribute selective advantages. When one company receives subsidies, every other business effectively competes against a rival backed by public resources.

Supporters argue that without these incentives, Michigan would lose jobs to other states. But that raises a larger issue: if every state competes by offering bigger subsidies, taxpayers end up financing a race where corporations hold the leverage and governments write the checks. The result is often less like economic development and more like a bidding war.

Imagine redirecting that energy and money toward broad improvements that benefit everyone: lower taxes, better roads, stronger schools, workforce development, and streamlined regulations. Those investments do not depend on predicting which companies will succeed. They create conditions where all businesses can grow.

Abolishing MEDC would not mean abandoning economic development. It would mean redefining it. Government's role should be to build a stable foundation, not pick winners and losers.

Michigan's future economy will not be engineered from conference rooms and incentive packages. It will be built by people taking risks, creating businesses, hiring workers, and investing in their communities.

The state should trust them to do it.

Consider the Fay Beydoun case. Beydoun, who served on MEDC's executive committee, was connected to a $20 million state grant for Global Link International that was administered through the state's economic development apparatus. Investigators later alleged that grant funds intended for economic development were diverted to personal expenses and unrelated spending. Prosecutors have alleged forged documentation, improper expenditures, and false reporting, while the attorney general described the process as one with minimal oversight and unusual political connections.

Then there is the Clare Complete Health Park project. A $25 million earmark for a health and recreation complex was awarded to a nonprofit created shortly before funding was approved. State officials later suspended payments after identifying red flags, including allegations involving self-dealing and undisclosed financial relationships. The founder now faces felony charges related to the handling of grant money, and investigators recovered millions of dollars in unused taxpayer funds.

These examples involve different people, different regions, and different political circles. One grew from Detroit-area business networks; another emerged from legislative relationships in rural Michigan. Yet they raise the same question: why does Michigan continue relying on systems where politically connected projects can receive tens of millions of taxpayer dollars before basic warning signs are detected?

The issue is larger than any individual scandal. It is whether government should continue operating an economic development model that concentrates public money, discretion, and influence in ways that can reward access rather than results.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Affordability at a Breaking Point

Dear Editor:

Affordability has become a defining concern for millions of Americans. Recent remarks dismissing household financial struggles risk undermining political messaging on the cost of living—an issue that a majority of Americans now say is their top priority. Surveys indicate that 77% of Americans believe current policies have increased living costs, while 75% report that global conflicts are negatively impacting their personal finances.

These national trends are reflected locally. In Van Buren County, Michigan, the minimum wage currently stands at $13.73 per hour, with an increase to $15.00 scheduled for January 2027. While wage growth is notable, it continues to lag behind rising costs, leaving many households under strain. Lower-income Americans, in particular, are operating in what experts describe as a "survival economy." Spending has shifted sharply toward necessities, with households cutting back on dining, retail, and other discretionary expenses. Grocery prices have risen steadily, fueled in part by surging transportation costs. Gasoline prices have climbed above $5 per gallon. Diesel fuel has exceeded $6.00 per gallon which has a greater effect of increasing the cost of moving goods and driving up the price of essentials such as produce, meat, and dairy. Some items, including fresh vegetables, have seen especially sharp increases due to supply disruptions and higher logistics costs.

The financial pressure extends beyond the checkout line. Nearly one-third of Americans report skipping medical care or relying on credit cards to cover basic expenses. Housing affordability has also deteriorated, with 86% of non-homeowners believing homeownership is out of reach. At the same time, reductions in food assistance programs have further strained already tight household budgets.

These economic pressures are contributing to widespread pessimism. Nearly three-quarters of Americans say it is harder to get ahead today than it was for previous generations. While higher-income households with assets continue to spend, lower-income families are experiencing conditions similar to a recession.

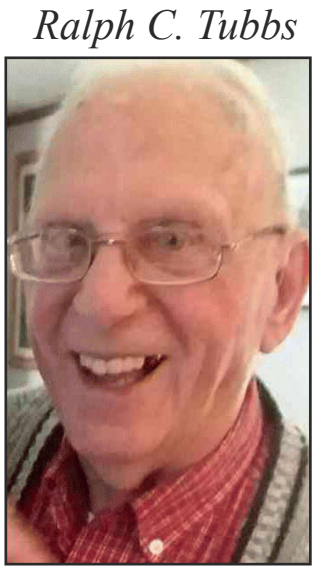
Underlying these challenges are persistent economic inequalities that disproportionately affect communities of color. Structural barriers, income disparities, and limited access to higher-paying jobs continue to hinder long-term financial stability, even as these communities contribute significantly to economic growth.

Affordability is no longer an abstract policy issue—it is a daily reality shaping how Americans live, spend, and plan for the future. Addressing the issue requires not only acknowledgment, but sustained and meaningful action.

E. Hellwege
Village of Paw Paw

OBITUARIES

Ralph C. Tubbs



Ralph passed away on January 2, 2026 in Brooksville FL at the age of 92.

He was born January 7, 1933 in South Haven, Michigan to Charles Tubbs and Louise (Nielsen) Tubbs. He graduated from South Haven High School in 1950. He married Claudia J. Meyer on July 25, 1953.

Ralph was in the US Army from March 1953 to March 1955. As a Graphic Artist he worked mostly at the South Haven Daily Tribune until he was able to become a partner at The Service Press, then later owning the company, renaming it Tubbs Printing. After selling the business Ralph and Claudia moved to Green Lake, Wisconsin for a job opportunity, spending 20 years there, Ralph finished his working career at EP Direct Econoprint. Ralph and Claudia retired in 2003 and moved to Brooksville FL. He was a very hardworking man and would help anyone.

He was preceded in death by his son Niel, in 2010 and wife Claudia, in 2015, one brother Edward Tubbs, three sisters, Lois Tubbs, Dona Moritti and Dora Hamilton. Also, two Sisters-in-laws, Peggy (Campbell) Tubbs and Charlotte (Meyer) Strebeck, four Brothers-in-Laws Robert Brambley, Martin Strebeck, Clifford Hamilton, and Daniel Moritti.

Survived by three sons Andrew (Terri), Brian, Steven and one sister Susan Brambley, five Grandchildren, seven Great Grandchildren, and one Great-Great Grand Child, and a host of Nieces and Nephews.

A memorial service will be held on June 11, 2026 at 11:30 am at Lakeview Cemetery in South Haven MI. There will be a gathering after the service at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church, 6321 Blue Star Highway, South Haven MI.

Maryann Berry

Maryann Berry, 83, of Paw Paw, passed away peacefully on Thursday, May 28, 2026, at her home in Paw Paw. She was born May 24, 1943, in Paw Paw, Michigan, the daughter of Walter Owsiany and Violet (Osborne) Owsiany.

Maryann was known to many as "mom" and was a very easy-going person, despite her rough exterior. She enjoyed her trips up north to her cabin with family. Maryann owned many motorcycles and rode as often as she could. She was always on the lookout for yard sales and anything free on the curbside. Maryann enjoyed reading and collecting items, especially anything pig related. Her home was always very clean and organized. Maryann loved her junk food, coffee and cigarettes. Her neighbors knew her as having the "noisiest" windmill around. Above all else, Maryann loved and cherished her family. She was extremely generous and would do anything for them. She will be deeply missed.

She is survived by her son, Raymond (Tammy Jo) Berry; daughter, Robin (Christopher Davidson) Ponicki; grandchildren, Caleb Berry, Shelby (Brandon) Wanink and Leona Ponicki; great-grandson, Elijah Root; and brothers, Dick (Kathy) Owsiany and Roger Owsiany.

Maryann was preceded in passing by her parents, husband, Raymond "Carl" Berry and siblings, Carol Ragen Stone and Walter Owsiany.

In accordance with Maryann's wishes, cremation will take place. There will be a memorial service later in the summer.

Share a memory or sign the online guestbook at: adamspawpaw.com

Donald William Rhodes

Donald William Rhodes, 75, of Paw Paw, passed away Friday, May 22, 2026, at MediLodge of Marshall. He was born Nov. 23, 1950, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the son of Earl Rhodes and Virginia (Beheler) Rhodes.

Don was a proud Army veteran and enjoyed helping at the American Legion. He graduated from the University of Tennessee following his service in the military.

Don was a staple of Paw Paw. He could often be seen riding his bike around town, fishing, stopping in at Brewsters for a cup of coffee and selling at the Farmers Market. He was an extremely talented artist and liked to make pottery and draw. Many were in awe of Don's artistic talents and liked to buy his art. Don's presence will be deeply missed by his friends and family and his beloved community of Paw Paw.

He is survived by his sister, Ellen (Jim) VanHorn and brother, David (Linda) Rhodes.

Don was preceded in passing by his parents, sister, Martha Ullemeyer and brother, Richard Rhodes.

In accordance with Don's wishes, cremation will take place. There will be no public services at this time. He will be laid to rest at West Oshtemo Cemetery at a later date.

Memorial contributions may be directed to the American Legion McGowan-Johnson Post 68, P.O. Box 19, Paw Paw, MI, 49079.

Share a memory or sign the online guestbook at adamspawpaw.com

Bruce G.Herron

Bruce G.Herron, 72, of Paw Paw, passed away unexpectedly on May 23, 2026, at his home in Paw Paw, Michigan. Bruce was born on April 15, 1954, in Royal Oak, Michigan, to Clarence R. Herron and Bette J. Herron.

When Bruce was very young, the family moved to Fraser, Michigan, where he attended school through graduation. He then went to Michigan State University for two years until he decided to pursue other opportunities in his life. While at MSU, he met his future wife, Susan "Sue" L. Smith, from Lawrence, Michigan. They were married in 1974.

While his wife finished her degree, he started what would become the passion of his life, guitars. He took lessons and developed his playing skills and then went on to start building guitars in the late 1970s. He continued building and repairing many types of stringed instruments until his death as the Blue Star Guitar Company. He had his first shop for several years in Ganges, Michigan, before moving to his current home and shop north of Paw Paw. His electric instruments found their way around the world, going to England, Australia, and Japan to name a few!

Some of Bruce's other interests were racing motorcycles, open wheel modified midgets, and stock cars. He also participated in Cowboy Action Shooting for a while and continued to target shoot in the backyard. He collected cowboy memorabilia, with Tim Holt as one of his favorites. He was a transported city boy, having a love for living in the country, camping and fishing. He always stayed true to his Detroit roots, being a lifelong fan of the Detroit Tigers, Lions and Red Wings, along with his beloved MSU Spartan sports.

Bruce is survived by his loving wife, Sue Herron; brother, Garry Herron; sister-in-law, Betty Pries; brother-in-law, Jim Smith, along with several nieces and nephews.

Bruce was preceded in passing by his parents, his in-laws, Wendell and Lois Smith of Lawrence, and his sister. Bruce will be missed by his many customers, for whom he dedicated great lengths of time to building custom instruments for, make repairs, and working to get them just right.

Cremation has taken place. A graveside service and time of visiting will take place at a later date this fall.

Share a memory or sign the online guestbook at adamspawpaw.com

Lori Marleah Lipari

Lori Marleah Lipari of Bangor, Michigan, died at home on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, surrounded by her family after a 6-month battle with cancer. Lori was born on September 12, 1955, in Easton, Pennsylvania to Betty Lyon Lipari and Rock Lipari.

She spent her early years in Pennsylvania and California, before moving to Portage, Michigan on Gourdneck Lake. After graduating from Portage Central High School, Lori moved to Columbia to attend the University of South Carolina, where she met her husband, Chuck Jordan, at a bar called Almost Nuts. They celebrated 45 years of marriage on Jan. 30, 2026. Lori was an ICU nurse at Columbia Baptist Hospital before moving to Bangor, Michigan in 1989 with her husband and three children, with two more children born at home later. She was a nurse supervisor at South Haven Community Hospital for 20 years. At the age of 55, Lori earned her Nurse Practitioner degree from the Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing, practicing in family clinics and at Vitality Home Health Services for eight years before moving on to full-time grandma.

Lori lived a full life with adventure, humor, and deep love for her family and friends. She cherished attending countless sporting events and band performances for her children, grandchildren, and foreign exchange grandchildren. She was proud of all their educational accomplishments, especially her grandson's high school graduation this May. Lori loved spending time with her nurse friends, listening to local live music, riding her e-bike to count turtles along the Paw Paw River, playing Bridge at the Kalamazoo Bridge Club, sharing laughs with her Encore Club friends, and learning to make pottery at Khnemu Studio. Lori also traveled to Spain, Japan, Hawaii, Turkey and she especially loved Crete. Lori enjoyed reading, sailing, and playing backgammon, sequence and many other board games with her children and grandchildren. Surrounded by a large and loving family, Lori especially felt that love during the last six months of her life. She was deeply grateful for the many phone calls, visits, and thoughtful cards from dear friends, both lifelong companions and treasured newer friendships. Lori devoted her life to caring for others as a nurse, nurse practitioner, and mother, and her legacy of compassion, kindness, and love will continue through all who knew and loved her.

Lori was preceded in death by her parents, Betty and Rock Lipari, as well as many aunts and uncles.

She is survived by her loving husband, Chuck Jordan, who cared for her dutifully during her illness and before; her children Aly (John) Lipari of Schoolcraft, Jeffrey Lipari-Jordan of Hancock, Kira (Franz) Griggs of Portage, Wyatt (Alannah) Lipari-Jordan of Parchment, and Patrick (Sureau) Lipari-Jordan of Portage; her beloved grandchildren Colin (Grace), Amelia, and Blake Sager, Andrew Lucas, Le and Flora Griggs; her other favorite person in the world, her brother, Stephen (Megumi) Haynes of Honolulu, Hawaii; and her favorite pet, Spidercat.

Lori will be cremated at Adams Funeral Home in Paw Paw, Michigan. A small celebration of life with her immediate family and close friends will be held at a later date. Thank you to the Bronson oncology team led by Anna Hoekstra, and the Centrica Hospice Care for their compassionate care during Lori's illness.

In lieu of flowers, friends may make donations to Frontier Nursing University 2050 Lexington Road, Versailles, KY 40383, The West Michigan Cancer Center, 200 N. Park Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007, an educational organization, or a charity of your choice.

Share a memory or sign the online guestbook at adamspawpaw.com

Sheriff's Report-- Suspect arrested in Bangor Township assault

Van Buren County Sheriff's Office Uniform Response handled an assault in progress in Bangor Township. "One deputy who responded was sucker punched and injured during the incident. The suspect in the incident was lodged," said Van Buren County Sheriff Daniel Abbott.

Uniform Response handled an assault incident in Hartford City. The incident involved a city council member and a resident of Hartford. The report was sent to the Van Buren County Prosecutor's Office for review of charges.

Uniform Response assisted Cass County Sheriff's Office with a pursuit that came into Porter Township. "Stop sticks were successfully deployed and the suspect vehicle came to a stop shortly after that. The Decatur man was turned over to (TOT) Cass deputies. The passenger had a warrant for their arrest, so they were arrested and TOT Cass County deputies as well," said Sheriff Abbott.

Uniform Response handled a car versus bike accident in Bangor Township. "The bike rider was transported to the hospital with serious injuries but was in stable condition shortly after arrival. Our accident reconstructionist went to the scene and reconstructed the crash. The accident remains under investigation," said Sheriff Abbott.

Uniform Response had a pursuit in Antwerp Township. "A deputy attempted to stop a vehicle for numerous traffic violations, but they failed to stop for the deputy. When the driver stopped, he wouldn't comply with the deputy or assisting officer, hence, started resisting/fighting with them. The driver was lodged and now faces several charges," said Sheriff Abbott.

Uniform Response handled a single vehicle crash in Decatur Township. The driver was not hurt during the crash. "The investigation found that the driver was intoxicated and was lodged for operating under the influence of alcohol," said Sheriff Abbott.

Uniform Response stopped a vehicle in Geneva Township for going 100 mph. The driver was intoxicated and lodged for operating under the influence of alcohol.

"Our Office of Domestic Preparedness/Emergency Management has been conducting active assailant trainings for several places of worship throughout the county. They also conducted tornado drills for several county operated buildings this past week. All their activities have gone well," said Sheriff Abbott.

"Our office participated in the Area 17 Special Olympics Team Send Off. It is an event I truly look forward to every year being able to eat lunch with the athletes and their families then escort them to the highway. Thank you to the Knights of Columbus out of Paw Paw for hosting this every year and allowing myself and others to participate in it," said Sheriff Abbott.

Uniform Response handled an MDOP (malicious destruction of property) at Gobles Elementary School. "The suspect was caught on camera in which he threw rocks through several windows. Our office was able to ID him as we've dealt with him in the past. Deputies were able to locate him, interview him, and he's now lodged for the incident as well as a probation violation warrant," said Sheriff Abbott.

Van Buren Tech celebrates its 50th anniversary

For 50 years, Van Buren Tech has transformed lives, created opportunities, and built lasting connections for students across Van Buren County and beyond. On May 27, Van Buren Tech celebrated its 50th anniversary with an evening honoring five decades of Career & Technical Education excellence and the generations of students, educators, and community members who have shaped its legacy. As part of the celebration, Van Buren Tech was honored to receive a proclamation from South Haven Mayor Annie Brown, shown in center, with Robert Smith, Van Buren Tech Director, at left, and Dave Manson, Van Buren Intermediate School District Superintendent, at right, recognizing the school's lasting impact and contributions to education, workforce development, and the broader Van Buren County community over the past five decades. Tours were also given of the building. The event concluded with a Staff Legacy Hour, where former and current staff members shared memories, reflected on the history of Van Buren Tech. Courier-Leader photos/Paul Garrod

LAWRENCE - For 50 years, Van Buren Tech has transformed lives, created opportunities, and built lasting connections for students across Van Buren County and beyond. On May 27, Van Buren Tech celebrated its 50th anniversary with an evening honoring five decades of Career & Technical Education excellence and the generations of students, educators, and community members who have shaped its legacy.

As part of the celebration, Van Buren Tech was honored to receive a proclamation from South Haven Mayor Annie Brown recognizing the school's lasting impact and contributions to education, workforce development, and the broader Van Buren County community over the past five decades.

The proclamation from Mayor Brown read in part:

"Van Buren Technology Center has faithfully served the students, businesses, and communities of Van Buren County for fifty years by providing high-quality career and technical education, workforce development, and lifelong learning opportunities.

"For five decades, Van Buren Technology Center has prepared generations of learners with the knowledge, technical skills, leadership abilities, and hands-on training necessary to succeed in an evolving workforce and contribute meaningfully to society.

"The dedicated educators, administrators, staff, industry partners, and community supporters of Van Buren Technology Center have demonstrated an enduring commitment to excellence in education, innovation in workforce preparation, and service to the economic vitality of the region.

"Van Buren Technology Center has played a vital role in strengthening local industries, supporting economic growth, and connecting education with employment opportunities that benefit both individuals and the broader community.

"The institution's legacy of collaboration, opportunity, and service has positively impacted thousands of students, families, employers, and residents throughout Southwest Michigan and beyond.

"The celebration of this 50th Anniversary marks not only a milestone in the history of Van Buren Technology Center, but also a recognition of its continuing mission to inspire achievement, develop skillsets and build a stronger future for the County." said Brown

The celebration brought together alumni and supporters from the Skills Center, Vo-Tech, Technology Center, and Van Buren Tech eras, alongside current students, staff, community members, the Van Buren Intermediate School District (VBISD) Board of Education, and district leadership.

For 50 years, Van Buren Tech has remained committed to providing meaningful opportunities for every student, regardless of the path they choose after graduation. Through hands-on learning experiences and industry-connected programs, students gain the skills, certifications, and confidence needed to succeed in college, careers, military service, and beyond.

CTE plays a critical role in strengthening the local economy by helping students become career-ready while supporting the workforce needs of businesses throughout Van Buren County and Southwest Michigan. From healthcare and education to skilled trades, agriculture, public safety, culinary arts, technology, and manufacturing, Van Buren Tech helps develop the next generation of skilled professionals who will continue contributing to the region's growth and success.

The evening also highlighted the relationships and sense of community built through Van Buren Tech over the last 50 years. Former staff members traveled from across the country to attend the celebration, reflecting the meaningful and lasting impact the school has had on countless individuals throughout its history.

Guests had the opportunity to tour the building, reconnect with former classmates and colleagues, and witness the continued growth and evolution of Van Buren Tech programs and facilities.

The celebration concluded with an exclusive Staff Legacy Hour, where former and current staff members shared memories, reflected on the history of Van Buren Tech, and celebrated the relationships and contributions built over the last five decades. Speakers emphasized the important role educators have played in shaping student success and expressed pride in how Van Buren Tech has evolved while looking ahead with excitement toward the next 50 years.

Van Buren Tech Director Robert Smith told those gathered at the Staff Legacy Hour, "Fifty years….It's a milestone that represents more than just a passage of time; it represents a half-century of ambition, hard work, and transformation. Whether you were a member of our pioneering "Skills Center" Staff of 1977, a current VB Tech staff member just beginning your journey, or a dedicated Vo-Tech or Technology Center staff member who called these halls home – Welcome back.

"We are here tonight to celebrate the legacy of Career & Technical Education in Van Buren County and the thousands of lives that have been shaped within these walls. To our former and current staff: Your passion is the heartbeat of this institution. You are the architects of the legacy we are celebrating. While technology in our labs has evolved over these past 50 years, the foundation of Career & Technical Education was built on your dedication, your late nights, and your unwavering belief in our students. You didn't just teach skills; you inspired, you motivated, you built confidence, you mentored future leaders and you paved the way for 50 years of innovation and excellence. We are standing on your shoulders tonight, and we are so incredibly grateful to have you here to celebrate this milestone with us."

Smith continued, "In 1977, the world looked very different, but the mission of CTE was exactly what it is today: to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world success. For five decades, we have been more than just a school. We have been Pioneers.

•"We have been the "first movers" in adopting cutting-edge technology.

•"We have been the workshop where students found their "spark."

•"We have been the engine driving our local economy and regional workforce.

Smith continued, "When we think back and compare the tools we used in the late 70s to the high-tech simulations and robotics we utilize today, we realize that while the gear may have changed, the CTE Spirit has remained constant: a relentless drive to adapt, to evolve, and to ensure our students are never just "ready for a job," but ready to lead in industry. Our alumni are our greatest credentials. Their success in the field and in life is proof that what we do here matters. Our current students are the next chapter. They are the pioneers who will carry this torch into a future of automation, green energy, and trades we haven't even named yet.

"The secret to our 50-year longevity isn't just sticking to what we know—it's also having the courage to change. As industry demands shifted, so did we. We modified programs, integrated new certifications, and built partnerships that didn't even exist when our first class walked through these doors. We've stayed relevant because we listened—to industry, to our advisory committees, to our instructors, to our staff, and most importantly, to our students."

He concluded, "We don't just teach for the workforce of today; we innovate for the workforce of tomorrow.

"Tonight, we honor the last 50 years by committing to the next 50. Let's celebrate the history we've made and the future we are currently building together. Thank you for being here to celebrate 50 years of CTE!"

Van Buren Tech extended a special thank you to Kurbside Food Truck, The Mobile Crave, and Sweet Stacks & Sodas Locas for being part of this milestone celebration, as well as Van Buren Tech Culinary Arts & Catering Management program team for preparing desserts for the Staff Legacy Hour.

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Buddy benches installed at South Haven Elementary Schools

By James Windell

Earlier in this school year, the Superintendent of South Haven Schools issued a challenge to Lincoln Elementary Success Coach Kate Hybels.

That challenge?

Find ways in our school district to increase student voices.

Hybels, who once taught English in Brooklyn, New York, remembered a program she ran with high school students to train them to effect change in their school communities. She wondered if she could use a similar approach with elementary students in South Haven and give them a chance to bring about change in their school.

With support from both Ana Aleman-Putman, South Haven's Superintendent, and the Principal of Lincoln Elementary, Katie Jobson, she began what would be a student-directed adventure.

The adventure began when seven students were nominated to participate – one from each 3rd grade class at both Lincoln and Maple Grove. Hybels began meeting with these seven children in November 2025 and she informed them that their goal over the course if the 2025-2026 school year would be to work together to make their community better in some way.

Students taking part in the program from Lincoln Elementary were Shelby LaRowe, Weston Pratt, and Azalea McCullum. Those from Maple Grove Elementary were Dylan Clara-Lopez, Lily Stein, Daleyza Mayao-Manzano, and Ethan Jerch.

Initially the kids learned about the community of South Haven, including what assets we have, how the government is organized, and how decisions are made. They met and interviewed the South Haven City Manager, Kate Hosier. Then, they learned about South Haven Schools and how the school system is organized and how decisions are made.

With knowledge of the city and the school district under their belts, they began to study observation and inquiry, which led to them writing a 12-question survey in order to dig deeper into what their peers thought about their schools.

Most of the questions in the survey were about the playground and recess because the original goal of this group was to add equipment to the playgrounds at both schools. However, when they got the data back from the surveys, they learned that more than 60% of their peers were quite satisfied with their playgrounds. They had no data to back up going to their principals and making a case for more investment in playground equipment.

Hybels, acting as their coach in this process, described what happened next: "What they did was to analyze the data," she recalls. "What they found was that many students were interested in having the option for inside recess on some days. That led to a follow-up question: Why?"

In asking that why question, these inquisitive third-graders found that some students didn't like recess because they had no friend to play with.

"It was such a joy to see how much they cared about this response," Hybels said. "They engaged in a lengthy discussion with much empathy and sharing."

Out of that discussion came an idea. Why not bring back a buddy bench? One of the girls from Lincoln Elementary remembered that they used to have a buddy bench at her school, but it was old and dilapidated and eventually met its end in a snowstorm last year. Another student added that students didn't really know what the purpose of the buddy bench was and so it wasn't used correctly.

As they brainstormed this idea, the seven children decided that if they could get new buddy benches, there would have to be some way to help all the students know what the benches were for and that they should be constructed so they wouldn't fall apart over the next winter.

But this was just an idea. How could they bring it to life? They decided they needed to do more work.

So, they first created a presentation to pitch both principals – Katie Jobson at Lincoln and Seth Siuda at Maple Grove. Their presentation was successful. Their next meeting was with Kevin Dee, Director of all Non-Instructional Programs and Facilities. They had to learn what the rules were about playgrounds and equipment. Following this, they wrote an email to request support from the community. It was passed around, and eventually got to Dwight Click at Overisel Lumber Co., South Haven. He invited the kids to pitch him their idea. After their pitch he donated two benches to their project.

Next the students had to consider how to decorate the benches. After meeting with Mrs. Tanya Ebert, the Lincoln Elementary Art teacher, to discuss designs for the benches, they came up with two different plans - one for each bench. Mrs. Ebert agreed to lead the decorating project and include students from the rest of the school.

Finally, the students wanted to do a how-to video to teach other students how to use the buddy benches. The kids reached out to Ram News Nation at the high school to see if they'd help in creating a How-To video. The South Haven High School principal, Amy Cockburn, was very supportive, and two seniors, Max Verseput and Will Marcoux, agreed to produce the video. They interviewed the students involved in the project and the resulting video will be shared with both Lincoln and Maple Grove students when the benches are installed.

The end of this story is that on Friday, May 29, 2026, after the two buddy benches were decorated by students, they were installed in short ceremonies at both schools.

With second and third graders gathered around the buddy bench on the playground at Maple Grove Elementary, two student involved with the project spoke:

"This buddy bench is for Maple Grove Elementary," said one of the third graders.

"The buddy bench is for a buddy," added another third grader who worked on the project. "If you need someone to play with, go sit on the buddy bench and a friend will find you."

After a few photos were taken, the installation was complete.

"I'm so proud of what these students have achieved, but I'm not surprised," said a smiling Kate Hybels as she watched the students gather around the bench for a photo. "As adults we think we have all the answers for the next generation, while much of the time we aren't even asking the right questions."

After the buddy bench was installed at Lincoln Elementary, she said that she hopes they can continue developing the student voice in our district and empowering students to effect change in the community.

"When we make space for students' voices, and we honor their ideas by taking them seriously, we can effect really meaningful change together," she said.

Hybels said that the story is about two really awesome buddy benches. "More importantly," she pointed out, "it's about our students knowing they can make our world better. It's our job to give them the opportunities to know that."

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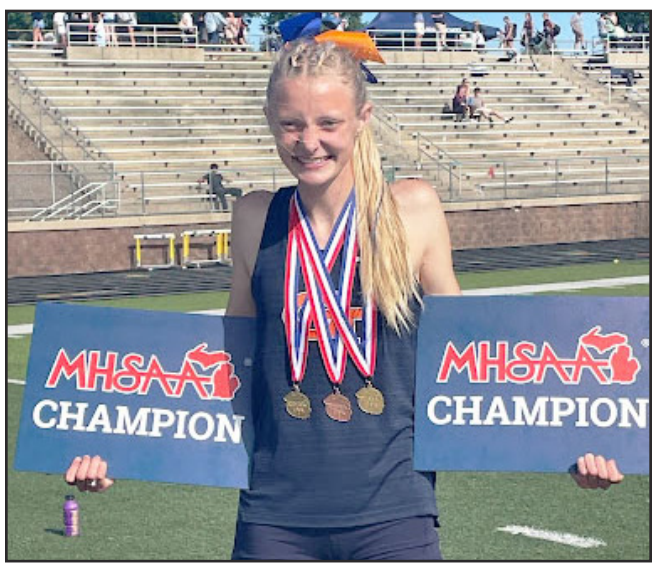
SPORTS

Gobles track girls fifth in the state

Girls 4x800 Relay team of Libby Smith, Lauren Shaffer, Ava DeYoung, Madison Cooley for Gobles were state Champions in a school record time of 9:46.17.



Libby Smith was seventh in the 1600 meter run with a time of 5:22.15 and State Champion in the 3200 meter Run with a time of 11:16.32

The Gobles seniors competing at the State Finals leave on a high note.

By John Raffel
Correspondent

GOBLES — Gobles girls track team was fifth and the boys were 35th on Saturday at Hudsonville in the Division 4 state finals.

For the girls, Lily Smith was first with a personal best (11:16.32) in the 3,200 meters, seventh in the 1,600 meters (5:22.15), Madison Cooley was sixth in the 800 meters (2:23.24), and the 4x800 relay foursome of Smith, Shaffer Ava DeYoung and Madison Cooley was first (9:46.17).

Taylor Cooley had a personal best of 5-2 in the high jump (5-2).

For the Gobles boy, Steven Juarez, Coal Otis, Jayden Otis and Nathan Ray was fourth (44.42) in the 4x100 relay. The 4x200 relay team of Steven Juarez, Coal and Jayden Otis and Ray was eighth (1:33.39).

Coal Otis, Steven Juarez, David Sage and Nathan Ray were ninth in the 4x400 relay (3:34.09).

The varsity boys and girls teams traveled to Hillsdale Academy to compete in the MITCA Teamstate Championship meet. There, the top teams in the state competed for the team state trophy. It was a rainy Saturday, and the table was set for a high-level competition. It was. The boys finished 5th out of the 15, and the girls finished 4th out of the 13 best teams in the state.

Team awards went to the following athletes:

Tough As Nails - Cole Cannon, Girls Field events for competing in the rain.

PR - Cole Ringel, Lauren Shaffer - both setting huge PRs in the mile.

MVP - Nathan Ray, Girls team.

Hype Crew MVP - Thomas Burrell, Freedom Morris.

Paw Paw's baseball season ends

How do your earn wins for two different teams? Caden Bowen earned the pitching win for Paw Paw and Kalamazoo Central.

By John Raffel
Correspondent

PAW PAW — Paw Paw's baseball season ended at 18–1 with a 12-3 loss to Vicksburg on May 30 n district baseball action.

Caden Bowen took the loss for Paw Paw, going four inning snd allowing seven ransom for its, strikng out three nd walking six. Maverick Johnson, benny Flanders, Ryan homes, Remi Dempsey, Gavin Sellers and Hayden Criger had one hit apiece for the Wolves.

Paw Paw had ended the regular season on May 26 and May 27 with a split against Kalamazoo Central. The first game was at Kalamazoo which the Wolves won 8-1.

The Giants were home the next day and beat Paw Paw 7-2.

In Paw Paw's win, Bowen earned the pitching victory.

Offensively, Bowen had three RBIs and two hits plus two stolen baes. Carter Nuhl had wo hits.

In the loss to KC, Ryan Holmes, Gavin Allers, Caden Bowen and Hayden Trigger had hits.Paw Paw had wins of 6-5 and 10-1 over South Haven on May 20 Bryn Carlsen earned the win inherited first game Bowen had three hits and Hayden Crier had two for Paw Paw.

Bowen fanned 12 batters in the 10-1 win.

Bangor's soccer season ends

It was an historic season for Bangor's soccer team.

By John Raffel
Correspondent

BANGOR — The Bangor Lady Vikings closed out their girls soccer season on Friday with a tough 6-1 loss to Saugatuck in the final match of the year. Despite the result, the Lady Vikings finished the season with a winning 12-8 overall record and an impressive 7-1 SW10 Conference record.

Sophomore Isabella Macedo scored the lone goal for Bangor, while goalkeeper Solexey Calderon once again stepped up with 11 saves in net.

"This season was one to remember for the program as the Lady Vikings captured the SW10 Conference Championship — the first conference title in program history — and also won the Bangor Vikings Invite at home," coach Antonio Robles said.

'The team will also say goodbye to three seniors who helped build the culture of the program: captain Madison Lennox, a great leader on and off the field, along with Isabela Ibarra and Yorleni Ruiz Mejia. Their dedication and leadership will truly be missed.

Offensively, "the future looks bright for Bangor," Robles said. "Sophomore Andrea Barajas finished the season with 18 goals and 3 assists, while fellow sophomore Isabella Macedo led the team with 19 goals and 2 assists. Samantha Ogrodny will also return as another key attacking player for the Vikings.

"In the midfield, Madgaly Gonzalez, Blanca Cruz, and freshman Nereida Sanchez will continue to be important pieces moving forward. Defensively, Keily Soriano, Maricruz Gomez, and Daniela Ramirez-Medrano will lead a strong back line next season.

"In goal, sophomore standout Solexey Calderon finished the season with 96 saves and 6 shutouts, continuing to prove herself as one of the top goalkeepers in the SW10 Conference.

"The future is bright for the Lady Vikings, and with so many key players returning, Bangor soccer will look to build on this historic season next year."

Bangor baseball

Last week "we concluded our season in the pre-District game vs Fennville," Bangor coach Nick Cox said. "We started off slow, giving up four in the top of the 1st but chipped away, going into the seventh with a 9-5 lead. Fennville was down to their last out and found a way to score 7 runs to win the game 12-9.

"I would like to thank all the players for the season, especially the seniors that played their last game. Wyatt Schneider, Nick Hardester, Jorge Dominguez, Peyton Cannon, Jaxon Webb, and Terrance Payne."

Paw Paw girls win district

By John Raffel
Correspondent

PAW PAW — Paw Paw is 33-4 after beating Otsego 6-2 in the title game of the districts.

Cami VaderMeeden had three hits including a double for Paw Paw.

Lauren MacKellar was the winning pitcher for the Wolves.

Elizabeth VandeBurg also had three hits for Paw Paw.

Paw Paw beat the Trojans in the first game 18-1. Ckemons gave up no hits and one run in five innings of work.

Paw Paw will play in the regionals this weekend.

Teams win districts

By John Raffel
Corrrespondent

Mattawan baseball and Gobles softball won districts last weekend and play in the regionals this week.

Gobles is 30-6 and beat Climax Scotts 2-0 in the district title game.

Kelsee Sherrod allowed four hits in the pitching victory. Daisy Jackson had two RBIs for Gobles.

For Mattawn, the Wildcats are 29-9-2 after a district title win over Kalamazoo Central 8-0.

Kaden Jominy was the winning pitcher and Max Vanantwerp threw in relief.

Patrick Dougherty had three hits.

Lawrence athlete concludes shiny career

By John Raffel
Correspondent

LAWRENCE — At the MHSAA LP Division 4 Finals in Hudsonville, senior Carolina Mancera ended her Lawrence track and field career with another big meet.

"This season marked her third year in a row qualifying for the State Finals, a rare achievement that reflects her consistency, discipline, and competitive drive,: coach Tony DeVauld said. "Carolina entered the Finals after winning her Regional title in discus. She carried that momentum into the biggest meet of the year and delivered one of her strongest performances. Her throw of 113 feet 1 inch earned her 5th place in the state, securing All State honors and placing her among the top throwers in Michigan Division 4.

"Carolina's success this season reflects years of steady growth and commitment to her craft. She has been a dependable leader for Lawrence, and her ability to perform at her best on the biggest stages has defined her career.

"Carolina leaves behind a legacy that will inspire future athletes at Lawrence. Her final performance in Hudsonville was more than a mark on the results sheet. It was the perfect conclusion to a remarkable high school career."

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Rams baseball season ends in districts

By Tom Renner

The tournament trail was a short one for the South Haven baseball team who bowed to Plainwell in the District semi-finals 6-4 on Saturday. The Rams end the season with a 21-10-1 record. In the other semi-final, Otsego defeated Allegan, 10-2. Otsego captured the District championship with a 4-1 win over Plainwell. Otsego advances to Regional play against Coldwater at Coldwater on Wednesday.

Rams' Max Hanny dives back into first base to avoid pickoff tag by Plainwell's Brady Howard.

South Haven's Watt Dotson slides safely ahead of throw to second base.

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VILLAGE OF MATTAWAN PLANNING COMMISSION NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Village of Mattawan Planning Commission will consider a **Special Land Use Request** received from Tim Spiech, to allow for a **Nail Salon Home Based Business at 58633 Ryan Rd., Mattawan property ID # 80-46-700-100-10** in the Village of Mattawan.

1169-C26B1 13-3-13 1495-793 1497-62 1505-131 1561-519 1586-987 1639-295 1719-52 *** COM AT S 1/4 PT OF SEC, TH NLY ALG N&S 1/4 L 1292.13', TH S 73 DEG 57'28"W 468.76' TO ELY L OF RYAN RD, TH N 37 DEG 19'55"W ALG SD ELY L 393.3', TH CON ALG SD ELY L ALGA 414.97' RADIUS CURVE TO THE LEFT 108.64', SD CURVE HAVING A CHORD BEARING N 44 DEG 48'20"W 108.33', TH N 52 DEG 16'15"W ALG SD ELY L 526.71', TH CON AGL SD ELY L ALG A 319.92' RADIUS CURVE TO THE RIGHT 90.04', SD CURV HAVING A CHORD BEARING N 44 DEG 12'26"W 89.75', TH N 34 DEG 11'50"W ALG SD ELY L 23.85' TO BEG TH CON N 34 DEG 11'50"W ALG SD ELY L 213.45', TH N 76 DEG 15'20" E 285.38', TH N 0 DEG 12'35"E 421.15', TH S 88 DEG 04'E PAR WITH E&W 1/4 L 889.5', TH S 0 DEG 12'35" 456.38', TH S 74 DEG 08' 52"W 177.35', TH N 0 DEG 12'35"E 420.58', TH N 88 DEG 04'W PAR WITH SD E&W 1/4 L 669', TH S 0 DEG 12'35"W 523.30', TH S 76 DEG 15'20"W 212.59' TO BEG.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the request will be considered by the Planning Commission at their meeting to be held on **June 25, 2026 @ 7:00 PM** for the purpose of receiving public comment regarding the proposed special land use. All interested persons will be given an opportunity to be heard.

This home based business will nail and tooth gem services in the home. We encourage the public to attend to express their opinions and learn about this project.

The meeting will be held in the Village Office meeting room at the address below. Please send all written comments to:

Village of Mattawan
24221 Front Avenue, Mattawan, MI 49071
(269) 668-2128 • offices@mattawanmi.com

Jolie Storm-Artis, Village Clerk
May 28, 2026

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON INCREASING PROPERTY TAXES

The Bloomingdale Township Board of the Township of Bloomingdale will hold a public hearing on a proposed increase of 0.0432 mills in the operating tax millage rate to be levied on property in year 2026.

The hearing will be held on Wednesday, June 17, 2026 at 6:30pm at the Bloomingdale Municipal Hall, 109 E. Kalamazoo St., Bloomingdale MI.

The date and location of the meeting to take action on the proposed additional millage will be announced at this meeting.

If adopted, the proposed additional millage will increase operating revenues from ad valorem property taxes 2.70% over such revenues generated by levies permitted without holding a hearing. If the proposed additional millage is not approved, the operating revenue will increase by 2.15% over the preceding year's operating revenue.

The taxing unit publishing this notice, and identified below, has complete authority to establish the number of mills to be levied from within its authorized millage rate.

This notice is published by:

Bloomingdale Township
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Bloomingdale, MI 49026
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VILLAGE OF MATTAWAN
Zoning Board of Appeals
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Village of Mattawan Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a Public Hearing to consider a Variance Request received from **Edward Kucinich and Florence Kucinich** for property located at **23968 E. McGillen Avenue, Mattawan property ID # 80-46-700-057-20** requesting a variance from the Village of Mattawan Zoning Ordinance Article 10 Section 10.10 (B) Late Hours of Operation, Article 10 Section 10.20 (P) Restaurants (excluding drive-in restaurants or those with predominately drive-through facilities), and Article 14 Section 14.62 Drive-In and Drive -Through Establishments.

1169-B17 12-3-13 594-548 986-257+258 *** BEG SW COR; TH N00D32'22"E 311.69 FT; S87D54'13"E 330.37 FT; S00D32'22"W 311.24 FT; N87D58'58"W 330.36 FT TO POB. *** SPLIT ON 11/14/2024 FROM 80-46-700-057-01; FOR 2025

The variance, if granted, would allow for 24-hour operations, a restaurant with predominantly drive-through facilities, and double drive-through lane configuration.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that a Public Hearing on said request will be held on **June 22, 2026, before the Zoning Board of Appeals at 7:00 PM** in the Village Hall meeting room at which time all interested persons will be given an opportunity to be heard.

The meeting will be held in the Village Hall meeting room at the address below. Please send all written comments to:

Village of Mattawan
24221 Front Avenue, Mattawan, MI 49071
(269) 668-2128 • offices@mattawanmi.com

Jolie Storm-Artis, Village Clerk
May 29, 2026

PORTER TOWNSHIP, VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN NOTICE OF HEARING TO CONTINUE THE SPECIAL ASSESSMENT DISTRICT FOR THE ERADICATION OR CONTROL OF AQUATIC WEEDS AND PLANTS FOR BANKSON LAKE

At its regular Board meeting on May 13, 2026, the Porter Township Board voted to proceed to carry out an improvement as provided in MCL 41.723(3)(1), and to continue the Special Assessment District already established for the eradication or control of aquatic weeds and plants for Bankson Lake. The plans and cost estimates are on file with the Township Clerk for public examination.

It is anticipated the total costs for treatment will be approximately the same as the previous treatments, and the charge will be $170/per unit per year for five years (2027-2031 inclusive).

A Hearing will be held on **June 10, 2026, at 6:45** p.m., at the Porter Township Hall, 88040 M-40, Lawton, Michigan.

If you are opposed to this assessment, a Petition signed by twenty percent (20%) or more of property owners protesting the continuation of the district or the assessment must be filed with the Township Board at or before the first hearing. Should the Board proceed with the special assessment, and you are opposed to the amount, you must appear and protest at the second public hearing to confirm the special assessment roll in order to appeal the amount of the special assessment to the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

Dated: May 13, 2026
Heather Smith, Clerk, Porter Township

PORTER TOWNSHIP, VAN BUREN COUNTY NOTICE OF HEARING TO REAFFIRM THE TOWNSHIP-WIDE SPECIAL ASSESSMENT DISTRICT

FOR THE COST OF CONSTRUCTION, IMPROVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ROADS LOCATED IN THE TOWNSHIP

The Porter Township Board, having previously established a township-wide Special Assessment District for the cost of construction, improvement, and maintenance of public roads located in the township, **HEREBY sets a public hearing for Wednesday, June 10, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. at the Porter Township Hall, 88040 M-40 Highway, Lawton, Michigan.**

The Porter Township Board will be in session to discuss and hear comments which may be offered regarding the re-affirmation of the township-wide special assessment in the amount of 1.0 mil (one mil), for the construction, improvement and maintenance of public roads located in the township. The nature of the improvement to be made is such that a periodic redetermination of cost and renewal of the levy shall be made on an annual basis.

The Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to those with disabilities planning to attend upon adequate notice to Heather Smith, Porter Township Clerk, in writing, or by calling the Township Hall at (269) 624-4022.

Dated: May 13,2026
Heather Smith, Clerk, Porter Township

PORTER TOWNSHIP, VAN BUREN COUNTY NOTICE OF HEARING TO RENEW TOWNSHIP-WIDE SPECIAL ASSESSMENT DISTRICT

FOR FIRE PROTECTION

The Porter Township Board, having previously established a township-wide Special Assessment District for the cost of fire motor vehicles, apparatus, equipment, housing and fire protection, **HEREBY sets a public hearing for Wednesday, June 10, 2026, at 6:15 p.m. at the Porter Township Hall, 88040 M-40 Highway, Lawton, Michigan.**

The Porter Township Board will be in session to discuss and hear comments which may be offered regarding the re-affirmation of the township-wide special assessment in the amount of 1.5 mil (one and one-half mil), for the cost and expenses of the fire motor vehicles, apparatus, equipment, housing and fire protection. The nature of the improvement to be made is such that a periodic redetermination of cost and renewal of the levy shall be made on an annual basis.

The Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to those with disabilities planning to attend upon adequate notice to Heather Smith, Porter Township Clerk, in writing, or by calling the Township Hall at (269) 624-4022.

Dated: May 13, 2026
Heather Smith, Clerk, Porter Township

=• PUBLIC NOTICE •=

ALMENA TOWNSHIP
SYNOPSIS
APRIL 15, 2026
Almena Township Board meeting was held April 15, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.
Attendance: Kelly Redmond, Scott Rueff, John Wagner, Tim Kloosterman, Mark Roman, Sandra Rickli and Joe Leduc.
a. Motion passed to approve agenda
b. Motion passed to approve meeting minutes of March 18, 2026
c. Disbursements approved in the amount of $142,496.81
d. Road Commissioner report
e. Sheriff's Dept. report
f. Mattawan Fire Department report
g. Public comment offered
h. Reports by officers presented
i. Motion to approve Energy Committee consultation with lawyer
j. Motion to contribute $3,000 to the Paw Paw Fire Dept. for equipment
k. Motion to approve a proposal from Kalamazoo Excavation to re-gravel cemetery
l. Public comment offered
m. Meeting adjourned 8:23pm
Sandra Rickli, Clerk, Almena Township

STATE OF MICHIGAN
36TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
VAN BUREN COUNTY
ORDER REGARDING ALTERNATE SERVICE
CASE NO. AND JUDGE
26 075634 CK
HON. SUSAN METZGER
Plaintiff's:
CITIZENS UNITED RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE, d/b/a CURE AUTO INSURANCE
Plaintiff's Attorney:
JONATHAN A. VANGEMERT (P71070)
612 W. University Drive, Suite 200
Rochester, MI 48307
Phone: (248) 601-4499
V.
Defendant's:
DYLAN MADISON
602 W. Van Buren St, Apt 5, Gobles, MI 49055

THE COURT FINDS:
Service of process upon the defendant, Dylan Madison cannot reasonably be made as provided in MCR 2.105 and service of process may be made in a manner that is reasonably calculated to give the defendant actual notice of the proceedings and an opportunity to be heard.
IT IS ORDERED:
2. Service of the summons and complaint other: Jury Demand and a copy of this order shall be made by the following method(s).
a. First-class mail to 602 W Van Buren St, Apt 5, Gobles, MI 49055
b. Tacking or firmly affixing to the door at 602 W Van Buren St, Apt 5, Gobles, MI 49055
.d. Other. Publication pursuant to MCR 2.106 (D) in Paw Paw Flashes and The Courier Leader.
For each method used, proof of service must be filed promptly with the court.
Judge Signature: Susan Metzger

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
The Richard W. Ludwig, Jr. Trust u/a/d March 2, 2011, as amended.
Date of Birth: 11/01/1949
NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Richard William Ludwig, Jr., who lived at 25798 Shore Drive, Lawton, Michigan 49065, died April 6, 2026.
Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Lorie J. Moreman, Trustee, 1931 N. Haskell Avenue, Willcox, AZ 85643 within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.
Date: 06/04/2026

STATE OF MICHIGAN
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
DECEDENT'S ESTATE
ESTATE OF THOMAS N. OLSON AND THE THOMAS N. OLSON AND SUSAN E. OLSON TRUST
Date of Birth: October 13, 1943
TO ALL CREDITORS:
NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, THOMAS N. OLSON, who lived at 706 Kentucky Avenue, South Haven, Michigan 49090, died on May 8, 2026. The decedent established the THOMAS N. OLSON AND SUSAN E. OLSON TRUST on April 20, 2018. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to VICTORIA OLSON-RUF, CO-TRUSTEE of the THOMAS N. OLSON AND SUSAN E. OLSON TRUST within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.
CO-TRUSTEE:
VICTORIA OLSON-RUF
612 Autumn Shore Drive
Lawrenceville, GA 30044
ATTORNEY:
SYDNEY E. PARFET
Howell Parfet Schau
350 East Michigan Avenue, Suite 500
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007
Telephone: (269) 382-5300

COUNTY: VAN BUREN; MTGR: DEREK FANKHAUSER; ATTY: SCHNEIDERMAN & SHERMAN, P.C. - SCHNEIDERMAN & SHERMAN, PC; 1ST PUB: 6/4/2026; ATTY FILE #: 26-001815-1; INSURER: (UNKNOWN)
NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE BY ADVERTISEMENT. Notice is given under section 49c of the State Housing Development Authority Act of 1966, 1966 PA 346, MCL 125.1449c, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Van Buren County, starting promptly at 1:00 PM, on July 02, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. MORTGAGE: Mortgagor(s): Derek Fankhauser and Mary Fankhauser, a husband and wife Original Mortgagee: The Huntington National Bank Date of mortgage: October 24, 2023 Recorded on October 25, 2023, Liber 1758, on Page 577, Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Michigan State Housing Development Authority Amount claimed to be due at the date hereof: Two Hundred Twenty Thousand Nine Hundred Eighty-One and 46/100 Dollars ($220,981.46) Mortgaged premises: Situated in Van Buren County, and described as: That part of the Northeast 1/4 of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 20, Town 4 South, Range 13 West, described as: Beginning at the North 1/4 corner of said Section; thence South 00 degrees 18 minutes 03 seconds East on the 1/4 Section line, 217.69 feet; thence North 89 degrees 23 minutes 33 seconds West parallel with the North Section line 623.98 feet; thence North 00 degrees 11 minutes 20 seconds East parallel with the North-South 1/8 line of the Northwest 1/4 218.45 feet to the North Section line; thence South 89 degrees 23 minutes 33 seconds East on the North Section line 623.57 feet to the Place of Beginning. EXCEPT: Commencing at the North 1/4 corner of Section 20, Town 4 South, Range 13 West, Porter Township, Van Buren County, Michigan; thence North 89 degrees 23 minutes 33 seconds West, 522.27 feet on the North line of said Section 20 to the Place of Beginning; thence continuing North 89 degrees 23 minutes 33 seconds West, 101.00 feet on the North line of said Section 20; thence South 00 degrees 11 minutes 20 seconds East, 657.67 feet; thence South 89 degrees 23 minutes 33 seconds East, 101.00 feet parallel with the North line of said Section 20; thence North 00 degrees 11 minutes 20 seconds West, 657.67 feet to the Place of Beginning. Commonly known as 84056 M 40, Lawton, MI 49065 The redemption period will be 6 month from the date of such sale, unless abandoned under MCL 125.1449v, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale, or 15 days from the MCL 125.1449v(b) notice, whichever is later; or unless extinguished pursuant to MCL 600.3238. Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. Michigan State Housing Development Authority Mortgagee/Assignee Schneiderman & Sherman P.C. 23938 Research Dr, Suite 300 Farmington Hills, MI 48335 248.539.7400
1595324
(06-04)(06-25)

NEW CCS PUB -> COUNTY: VAN BUREN; MTGR: CARRINGTON MORTGAGE VS JOSHUA L. NORTHRUP; ATTY: RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C. - RANDALL S. MILLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.; 1ST PUB: 6/4/2026; ATTY FILE #: 25MI00548-2; INSURER: (UNKNOWN)
CASE NO. 25-075091-CH CIRCUIT COURT SALE ATTENTION HOMEOWNER: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. In pursuance and by virtue of a Judgment of the Circuit Court for the County of Van Buren, State of Michigan, made and entered 24th day of April, A.D., 2026 in a certain cause therein pending, wherein Carrington Mortgage Services, LLC was the Plaintiff and Joshua L. Northrup and the United States of America were the Defendants. NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that I shall sell at public auction to the highest bidder, at public venue, at the Van Buren County Courthouse (that being the place of holding the Circuit Court for said County), on the 23rd day of July, 2026 at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Eastern Standard Time, the following described property, viz: Default has been made in the conditions of a certain mortgage made by Joshua L. Northrup, A Single Man to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc. as Mortgagee, as Nominee for Amerifirst Financial Corporation, its successors and assigns, Mortgagee, dated March 13, 2018, and recorded on March 15, 2018, in Liber 1665, Page 7, Van Buren County Records, said mortgage was assigned to Carrington Mortgage Services, LLC by an Assignment of Mortgage dated February 24, 2023 and recorded February 27, 2023, in Liber 1749, Page 239, Van Buren County Records, on which mortgage there is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of Two Hundred Twenty Thousand Eight Hundred Thirty-One and 81/100 Dollars ($220,831.81) including interest at the rate of 5.25000% per annum. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Said premises are situated in the Township of BLOOMINGDALE, Van Buren County, Michigan, and are described as: Beginning at a point found by commencing at the South 1/4 post of Section 2, Town 1 South, Range 14 West, Bloomingdale Township, Van Buren County, Michigan; thence West on the South line of the Section 1323.07 feet to the North-South 1/8 line of the Southwest 1/4; thence North 01 degrees 17 minutes 05 seconds West on said line 1153.83 feet to the place of beginning of this description; thence North 01 degrees 17 minutes 05 seconds West on said 1/8 line 164.00 feet to the East-West 1/8 line of said Southwest 1/4; thence South 89 degrees 51 minutes 03 seconds West on said 1/8 line 667.6 feet; thence South 01 degrees 44 minutes 24 seconds East parallel with the West line of the Section 164.00 feet; thence North 89 degrees 51 minutes 14 seconds East 666.36 feet to the point of this description. Commonly known as: 03090 37 1/2 ST, GOBLES, MI 49055 If the property is eventually sold at foreclosure sale, the redemption period will be 6.00 months from the date of sale. TO ALL PURCHASERS: The foreclosing mortgagee can rescind the sale. In that event, your damages are, if any, limited solely to the return of the bid amount tendered at sale, plus interest. Dated: June 4, 2026 Brian S. Salyer, Deputy Sheriff Randall S. Miller & Associates, P.C. Attorneys for Carrington Mortgage Services, LLC 43252 Woodward Avenue, Suite 180, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302, (248) 335-9200 Hours: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Case No. 25MI00548-2
(06-04)(07-09)

County: Van Buren; Mtgr: Gregory J. Giniel II; Atty: Orlans; 1st Pub: 5/28/2026; Atty File #: 26-004985; Insurer: (unknown)
Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Van Buren County, starting promptly at 1:00 PM on JULY 2, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Default has been made in the conditions of a mortgage made by Gregory J. Giniel II, to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as nominee for OCMBC, Inc., its successors and assigns, Mortgagee, dated October 17, 2022 and recorded November 1, 2022 in Liber 4812, Page 644 Van Buren County Records, Michigan. Said mortgage is now held by Brighthouse Life Insurance Company, by assignment. There is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of One Million Two Hundred Sixty-One Thousand Five Hundred Eighty-Three and 1/100 Dollars ($1,261,583.01).
Under the power of sale contained in said mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public vendue at the place of holding the circuit court within Van Buren County, Michigan at 1:00 PM on JULY 2, 2026.
Said premises are located in the Township of Casco, Van Buren County Michigan, and are described as:
Lot(s) 13, 14, 15 and 16, Block 5, Plat of Beverly Beach, according to the recorded plat thereof, as recorded in Liber 5 of Plats, Page 1.
7258 Beverly Drive, South Haven, Michigan 49090
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCLA §600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale.
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damage to the property during the redemption period. FinCEN reporting will be required of all successful purchasers, absent a lawful exemption.
Dated: May 28, 2026
File No. 26-004985
Firm Name: Orlans Law Group PLLC
Firm Address: 1650 West Big Beaver Road, Troy MI 48084
Firm Phone Number: (248) 502.1400
(05-28)(06-18)

County: Van Buren; Mtgr: ERIN MAPES; Atty: ROBERTSON ANSCHUTZ SCHNEID CRANE - RAS CRANE & PARTNERS (CC ON FILE); 1st Pub: 5/28/2026; Atty File #: 26-408893; Insurer: (unknown)
ROBERTSON, ANSCHUTZ, SCHNEID, CRANE & PARTNERS, PLLC, MAY BE DEEMED A DEBT COLLECTOR ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT. ANY INFORMATION WE OBTAIN WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE AT 13010 Morris Road, Suite 450, Alpharetta, GA 30004 ph:470-321-7112 Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in VAN BUREN County, starting promptly at 1:00P.M on June 25, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information: Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): ERIN MAPES. Default has been made in the conditions of a Mortgage made by ERIN MAPES to CHEMICAL BANK, original Mortgagee, for a mortgage dated June 28, 2007, and recorded on July 06, 2007, in Liber 1486 Page 193 in the Van Buren County Register of Deeds. Said mortgage was assigned through mesne assignments to U.S. BANK TRUST NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, NOT IN ITS INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUT SOLELY AS OWNER TRUSTEE FOR RCAF ACQUISITION TRUST, as documented by an assignment dated February 18, 2026, and recorded on April 6, 2026, in Liber 1790 Page 928 in the VAN BUREN County Register of Deeds, on which Mortgage there is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of $59,960.17. Under the power of sale contained in said Mortgage and the statute in such case made and provided, notice is hereby given that said Mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the Circuit Court within VAN BUREN County, Michigan on June 25, 2026 at 1:00 P.M. Said premises are located in the city of PAW PAW in VAN BUREN County, Michigan and are described as: THE NORTH HALF OF LOT 11, BLOCK 26, ORIGINAL PLAT OF THE VILLAGE OF PAW PAW, ACCORDING TO THE RECORDED PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN THE OFFICE OF THE REGISTER OF DEEDS FOR VAN BUREN COUNTY. Property Address: 320 E BERRIEN STREET, PAW PAW, MI 49079 Tax ID No. 80-47-126-011-00 The redemption period shall be Six (6) months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale. If this property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the Mortgage sale or to the Mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. U.S. BANK TRUST NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, NOT IN ITS INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUT SOLELY AS OWNER TRUSTEE FOR RCAF ACQUISITION TRUST, Mortgagee/Assignee May 28, 2026 ROBERTSON, ANSCHUTZ, SCHNEID, CRANE & PARTNERS, PLLC Attorney for Mortgagee/ Assignee 13010 Morris Road, Suite 450 Alpharetta, GA 30004 Telephone: 470-321-7112 Facsimile: 404-393-1425 Service Email: MIFCLTeam@raslg.com
(05-28)(06-18)

County: Van Buren; Mtgr: Chad Bedwell; Atty: Potestivo & Associates - Potestivo & Associates; 1st Pub: 5/28/2026; Atty File #: 322076; Insurer: FNMA
Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the Circuit Court in Van Buren County, starting promptly at 01:00 PM, on June 25, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): Chad Bedwell, Surviving Spouse Original Mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for Green Lending, its successors and assigns Foreclosing Assignee: PHH Asset Services, LLC Date of Mortgage: July 31, 2025 Date of Mortgage Recording: August 6, 2025 Amount claimed due on mortgage on the date of notice: $155,709.79 Description of the mortgaged premises: Situated in the City of Hartford, Van Buren County, Michigan, and are described as: LOT 16 OF PARASCANDOLO ADDITION NO. 1, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF RECORDED IN LIBER 5 OF PLATS, ON PAGE 16, VAN BUREN COUNTY RECORDS. Commonly Known as: 117 Paras Hill Dr., Hartford, MI 49057 The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale, or upon the expiration of the notice required by MCL 600.3241a(c), whichever is later; or unless MCL 600.3240(16) applies. If the property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, under MCL 600.3278, the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. Attention Purchaser: This sale may be rescinded by the foreclosing mortgagee for any reason. In that event, your damages, if any, shall be limited solely to the return of the bid amount tendered at sale, plus interest, and the purchaser shall have no further recourse against the Mortgagor, the Mortgagee, or the Mortgagee's attorney. Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice. This notice is from a debt collector. Date of notice: 05/28/2026 Potestivo & Associates, P.C. 251 Diversion Street, Rochester, MI 48307 248-853-4400 322076
(05-28)(06-18)

County: Van Buren; Mtgr: Barbara Lynn Rokos; Atty: Team H; 1st Pub: 5/14/2026; Atty File #: 521906F02; Insurer: (unknown)
Important mainly because it was sent directly to you
Click to teach Gmail this conversation is not important
Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement
Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Van Buren County, starting promptly at 1:00 PM, on June 18, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information:
Name(s) of the mortgagor(s): Barbara Lynn Rokos, a single woman
Original Mortgagee: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for lender and lender's successors and/or assigns
Foreclosing Assignee (if any): Village Capital & Investment, LLC
Date of Mortgage: October 26, 2020
Date of Mortgage Recording: October 30, 2020
Amount claimed due on date of notice: $50,976.11
Description of the mortgaged premises: Situated in Township of Hartford, Van Buren County, Michigan, and described as: Part of the Southeast 1/4 of Section 34, Town 3 South, Range 16 West, Hartford Township, Van Buren County, Michigan, described as beginning at the East 1/4 post of said Section 34, thence S 00 degrees 05 minutes 25 seconds W, along the East line of said Section, 1014.42 feet to the point of beginning of the land herein described, thence continuing S 00 degrees 05 minutes 25 seconds W, along the said East line, 300 feet to the South line of the Northeast 1/4 of said Southeast 1/4, thence N 89 degrees 45 minutes 00 seconds W, along said South line, 300 feet, thence North 00 degrees 05 minutes 25 seconds E, parallel with the East line of said Section, 300 feet, thence S 89 degrees 45 minutes 00 seconds E, parallel with the South line of the northeast 1/4 of said Southeast 1/4 300 feet to the place of beginning.
Common street address (if any): 70858 62nd St, Hartford, MI 49057-8659
The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a; or, if the subject real property is used for agricultural purposes as defined by MCL 600.3240(16).
If the property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278 the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period.
Attention homeowner: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice.
This notice is from a debt collector.
Date of notice: May 14, 2026
Trott Law, P.C.
31440 Northwestern Hwy, Suite 145
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
(248) 642-2515
1593393
(05-14)(06-04)

LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE PROPOSED 2026-2027 BUDGET

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on June 8, 2026, at 7:00 o'clock p.m., at 650 W. St. Joseph St., Lawrence, Michigan, the Board of Education of Lawrence Public Schools will hold a public hearing to consider the District's proposed 2026-2027 budget, L49 Millage, and State Aid Note Loan Application.

A copy of the proposed 2026-2027 budget, including the proposed property tax millage rate, is available for public inspection during normal business hours at 650 W. St. Joseph St., Lawrence, Michigan.

The property tax millage rate proposed to be levied to support the proposed budget will be a subject of this hearing.

This notice is given by order of the Board of Education.

Angela Marsh-Peek, Secretary
Lawrence Board of Education

PUBLIC NOTICE
PLANNING COMMISION
SPECIAL MEETING

Chair Clint Fournier has called a SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION to be held Thursday, June 25, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

This meeting is open to the public and will be held at the following location:

VILLAGE HALL
24221 FRONT AVENUE
MATTAWAN, MI 49071
(269) 668-2128

Jolie Storm-Artis, Village Clerk
May 27, 2026

Zoning Board of Appeals postpones variance decision

By James Windell

The most significant item on the agenda for the May 27, 2026 meeting of the Zoning Board of Appeals was the request by Chris Pisani of 248 Oak Street, South Haven for a variance.

Pisani applied for a nonuse variance seeking relief from Section 2112, Subsection 2 of the City's Zoning Ordinance which states, "Swimming pools shall be located at least 10 feet from any property line and shall be located in the side or rear yard only."

His property at 248 Oak Street is a one-acre parcel located in the R-1B zoning district. The parcel is landlocked, but access is provided by two easements at the northwest and northeast sides of the property. In November 2025, the existing home was demolished, and Pisani is in the process of building a new single family dwelling unit in a similar but conforming footprint. He would like to install a 16-foot by 40-foot inground pool to the north of the dwelling, in the front yard. Because the Zoning Ordinance does not permit swimming pools in the front yard, a variance is necessary to place the pool in this location.

According to Article 24 of the Zoning Board of Appeals, all dimensional and nonuse variance requests must not only be reviewed but they must meet the eight standards set forth in Section 2408. In this meeting, the ZBA carefully reviewed all eight standards but couldn't come to a decision because two of the standards (numbers 4 and 8) were sticking points.

Standard number 4 has to do with strict compliance with the requirements of this Ordinance which might unreasonably prevent the owner from using the property for a permitted purpose. In this case, strict conformity with the ordinance would prohibit the property owner from placing the pool in the desired location in the front yard. The ZBA had to consider whether granting the variance renders conformity unnecessarily burdensome or impractical. The other difficult standard (Number 8) asks whether the practical difficulty causing the need for the variance request was created by any action on the part of the applicant. Board members had differing opinions about this with some suggesting that the layout of the house could have been situated in other ways – eliminating the need for a variance request.

After an hour-long discussion, the ZBA passed a motion to postpone the decision to a future special meeting. In the meantime, the staff was asked to conduct further research to help the board decide on these two standards.

Following the postponement, the ZBA elected officers for the next year. Randy Timmer, the current Chair of the ZBA, was absent but he was elected to continue to serve in his position. Also, Don Bemis was elected to continue to serve as Vice Chair.

Reflecting on the lengthy discussion that resulted in a postponement of a decision on the variance request, ZBA members closed the meeting with their thoughts about the process and the kinds of discission the board engages in. Board member Chris Balicki began the closing comments by stating that it was a good meeting.

"Every time I come to one of these meetings, I understand why ZBA exists," he said. "It's because these are very complicated issues. There are no easy answers."

Amy Nichols followed up on this by commenting that "I would much rather postpone than make the wrong decision. So, I'm happy you guys were amenable to that. And yeah, I love the discussions. I like the back and forth. I think it's really very helpful."

Bemis had the final remarks before adjournment when he added: "That's why I'm glad that we have these discussions because whatever decision a board makes essentially resets the clock and the rules for everything from then on out.

"So, it's good to have discussion. I really like being on a board where there are differences of opinion, because otherwise we just reflect each other's opinions, and we miss big items."

A special meeting will be scheduled to revisit the variance request for 2148 Oak Street.

High School principal speaks to Rotarians

By James Windell

As Ross Woodhams said when he introduced South Haven High School Principal Amy Cockburn to the Rotary Club members on Tuesday Morning, May 26, 2026, "Amy is very soft-spoken, but she's incredibly fierce about her students and how they're taken care of."

Acknowledging that she gets nervous talking in front of a group of people, Cockburn (pronounced Coburn) added, "However, anytime I get to talk about our students, you guys may have to cut me off because I can talk about them all day."

She said that she wanted to address three things at the Rotary Club meeting that are "at the core of what we are as educators." She explained that those three things were "our mission, the people and the momentum that we have at South Haven High School."

Cockburn said that she could spell out the mission in a few short words. "It's our kids. That's what we're about," she said. "That's our goal every day. That's our focus. And everything that we can do to support them, we'll do. So, my goal is to give kids as many opportunities as I can."

She noted that it is not always clear as to where any particular student is headed. Are they going to go into the military, or go to college, or into the workforce? "It's our job to make sure that we give them the skills and knowledge so that they can choose," she said.

In talking about the people as a second core element of education, she said that making sure that kids get as many opportunities as possible, takes a lot of different people. "I've been at other school districts," she said, "and our staff is one of the most incredible staffs I have ever worked with. Besides just being there for kids, they go above and beyond. There are nights when I have teachers stay late just to talk about 'How are we going to help this student?'"

She noted that during the year she's been at South Haven High School, "I've never had a teacher just give up and say 'There's nothing we can do."

She also had kudos for the community. "I'm not, you know, from around here," she said. "It's taken me a very short time to realize how supportive this community is. One of the pieces of evidence I look at is the raft project that we did. A lot of you guys donated your time to come in and judge them."

Cockburn was referring to an assignment she gave students in a geometry class she was teaching this past spring. She asked students to apply circle geometry concepts in the construction of a raft that would be mathematically sound and buoyant. After students constructed their rafts, the rafts were tested in the high school pool and competed in a community-judged competition with members of the Rotary Club serving as judges.

"When you guys come in and provide just a different outlook, a different perspective, it can make all the difference for those kids," she said. "So thank you."

She went on to talk about momentum. "We talk about momentum, building positive momentum through instructional growth, relationship building, student support systems, student voice opportunities and expanded real-world learning experiences," she said. "Our job is to get these kids ready for all the different things that life is going to throw at them. I think the best way to do this is to make sure that they know that they have a say in what they do. We want our students to have an opportunity to have a voice in their learning. And with that we're building that momentum will lead into next year."

Cockburn ended her remarks by talking about successes this past year. After mentioning the History Club going to National finals, the robotics team in the state competition, the awards won by the drama club, and concerts by the band, she also praised the student athletes for their success. "We can look at their success – and that was awesome – but to me, the success was the community behind it. I've never seen anything like that. Like I said earlier, I have never been in a community that wants to support our schools like this community does."

Mental Health counseling not a sign of weakness at SHAES

By James Windell

If you are an average person, you may experience two or three traumatic events in your lifetime.

While even one of those traumatic events may cause you to have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, imagine having 400 or more traumatic events happen to you. How would that cumulative number of traumas change your life? Wouldn't you need mental health counseling?

The difference between you and first responders – fire fighters, police officers and EMS – is the number of traumas you will encounter in your lifetime.

As both South Haven Police Chief Adam DeBoer and South Haven Area Emergency Services (SHAES) Executive Director Brandon Hinz have pointed out in recent months, the average first responder must endure 400 to 600 traumatic events over the course of their career.

So, what are DeBoer and Hinz doing about this?

If these two leaders were old school, they might be encouraging their frontline staff members to "suck it up" and "deal with it." But that's not Hinz and DeBoer. Even before they became the head of their respective departments, they had talked about the effect of the jobs first responders do on their mental health.

Hinz talked about the mental health of the SHAES' staff in a recent interview in his office.

"The old mentality in past generations was that you just suck it up and you keep plugging away at it, you know? And that works for some people. It doesn't work for others," Hinz said reflecting back on how firefighters and other first responders dealt with trauma.

"First responders are five times more likely to die by suicide than by line-of-duty deaths," Hinz pointed out. "A persistent stigma in public service suggests that showing emotion or seeking help is a sign of weakness. This misconception has affected first responders nationwide, prompting campaigns across the U.S. to challenge the idea that public servants must suppress their emotions."

Hinz said that he and Police Chief DeBoer are part of a new wave of leaders who are becoming more proactive in supporting their staff and addressing the very real impacts of trauma.

To that end, SHAES and the South Haven Police Department are partnering to promote mental health awareness within their departments. "Although our agencies have long offered mental health support, the resources have not always been comprehensive," Hinz acknowledged.

SHAES now has a Chaplain who dedicates his time and support to their personnel. "Earlier this year, Adam DeBoer approached me about expanding mental health services tailored specifically to public safety professions, fire, EMS, and law enforcement," Hinz said. "I fully agreed. Any additional support we can offer our public service family strengthens our entire community."

Jon Vandenburg, the Chaplain, offers monthly meetings for SHAES and SHPD staff. "These meetings are low-pressure, informational learning experiences," Hinz said. "If one of our staff wants to meet with the Chaplain while he's here, they can. And if they prefer to give him a call or set up a meeting at a different date or location, they can do that as well."

Hinz notes that these services are available to all SHAES' staff and their immediate families. "It's all part of the deal," Hinz said. "They're here to help, they want to help, and if staff or a family member needs to talk, the Chaplain is available."

Hinz recognizes that events that first responders experience will cause trauma for one person, but not another. "Potentially traumatic incidents affect people

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differently," he said. "It might affect you more if you had to recover or rescue a child might be the same age as one of your kids or in a small town if you have to respond to the scene of someone you know or a relative. Or if you respond to a fire and it triggers something that happened in your past."

As the Director of SHAES, Hinz tries to encourage his staff to get help when it is needed. "I emphasize that they may need to talk through some of the things that happen to them," he said. "We don't hold on to the past when there was a stigma about reaching out for help and when people thought that you're not a real firefighter or cop if you have an issue with something."

With this emphasis, he said that he has had a lot of positive feedback from the younger generation of SHAES members who thank him for letting people know it is alright to seek help.

"Our goal is to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health in our departments and, in doing so, influence others in public service," Hinz concluded. "Mental health challenges have reached crisis levels nationwide. The best path forward is prevention – and we are committed to leading that change."

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